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ABSTRACT

This report describes research designed to examine questions about the amounts and kinds of positive examples appearing in children's television programming, the influence they have on children's prosocial behavior, and the circumstances that optimize attention to and comprehension of such content. A methodology for analyzing positive social content in television programming was developed and a manual for coding and evaluating prosocial behavior was completed. The manual provides general orientation to the coding task, gives examples of the categories of behavior, and explains how the coding is actually recorded. Two separate studies assessing the effects of viewing televised prosocial incidents were completed. The results of both studies indicate that a prosocial example shown on television can, under some circumstances, increase a child's willingness to engage in helping behavior. An initial analysis of attention to program content revealed certain program attributes which are identified with fluctuations in children's attention to a television program. The presence of animals, vigorous activity, music, pan camera shots and camera cuts were all related to increased attention in both boys and girls in a group 6 to 8 years of age. The manual for evaluating prosocial content of television programming is included in the appendix. (Author/JMB)

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ASSESSING TELEVISION'S INFLUENCE ON CHILDREN'S PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOR

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Assessing Television's Influence

on

Children's Prosocial Behavior

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PREFACE

The research project described in this report is unique in a number of ways. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first time two major industrial firms with extensive television advertising budgets have collaborated to support independent research exploring important social questions on how children respond to today's TV entertainment. We are especially grateful to General Foods Corporation and General Mills, Inc., for the financial support that permitted us to pursue this research.

The project is also singular because it is an initial step in establishing a coordinated program of research concerned with the prosocial aspects of television programming. While other researchers have been looking at this question and are now doing important work in an examination of the positive potential of television entertainment for children, this research began as a deliberate effort to try to answer the question: "Can today's TV entertainment instigate socially positive behavior in children?" Partly stimulated by this approach, two of us (Liebert and Poulos) are now embarked on a major effort exploring the ramifications of the research reported here plus other related work. Thus, this project has been partly instrumental in providing the hoped-for stimulus toward further exploration of the basic question.

And, finally, this report itself is the first in a series of occasional papers resulting from work undertaken under the auspices of the Brookdale International Institute. A major goal of the Institute is to develop methods to improve the effective translation of social science knowledge into action.

We would like to thank several individuals for their assistance at various points in the development of this project. Mr. John Adler of Ad Tel, Ltd., New York, was most helpful in the initial discussions resulting in the participation by General Foods and General Mills. Mr. Lawrence D. Gibson of General Mills and Mr. Bart R. Panettiere of General Foods provided extremely useful comments in sharpening the initial direction of the project. Mr. Gove Laybourn of General Mills and Mr. Sherman B. Shiller of General Foods have been helpful in their continuing interest and assistance in the ongoing work. We are also grateful to Mr. Stanley Stunnell of the Wrather Corporation for his generous contribution of prints of the *Lassie* shows which were used in the research. Emily S. Davidson and Joyce N. Sprafkin played major roles in the experimental work. Finally, thanks are also due the following for their direct assistance in the research: Elaine Brimer, Ann Covitz, Patricia Donagher, Francine Hay, Carol Keating, David Morgenstern, Steven Schuetz, and Elanna Yalow.

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November, 1974

SUMMARY HIGHLIGHTS

THREE RELATED OBJECTIVES WERE PURSUED IN THIS RESEARCH ON ASSESSING TELEVISION'S INFLUENCE ON CHILDREN'S PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOR.

1. A METHODOLOGY FOR ANALYZING POSITIVE SOCIAL CONTENT IN TELEVISION PROGRAMMING WAS DEVELOPED. A MANUAL FOR CODING AND EVALUATING PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOR WAS COMPLETED. THE MANUAL PROVIDES GENERAL ORIENTATION TO THE CODING TASK, GIVES EXAMPLES OF THE CATEGORIES OF BEHAVIOR AND EXPLAINS HOW THE CODING IS ACTUALLY RECORDED. THE CODE HAS BEEN SUCCESSFULLY ADOPTED IN TWO INDEPENDENT RESEARCH PROJECTS EVALUATING THE CONTENT OF OVER 400 NATIONALLY TELEVISED PROGRAMS.

2. TWO SEPARATE STUDIES ASSESSING THE EFFECTS OF VIEWING TELEVISED PROSOCIAL INCIDENTS WERE COMPLETED. WHILE NOT ALL THE MEASURES PRODUCED SIGNIFICANT FINDINGS, THE RESULTS OF BOTH STUDIES INDICATE THAT A PROSOCIAL EXAMPLE SHOWN ON TELEVISION CAN, UNDER SOME CIRCUMSTANCES, INCREASE A CHILD'S WILLINGNESS TO ENGAGE IN HELPING BEHAVIOR. FURTHERMORE, THE RESEARCH FINDINGS SHOW THAT SUCH TELEVISION PROGRAMMING CAN FEATURE ACTION AND ADVENTURE AND STILL HAVE A SALUTARY RATHER THAN NEGATIVE SOCIAL INFLUENCE ON THE CHILD VIEWER.

3. AN INITIAL ANALYSIS OF ATTENTION TO PROGRAM CONTENT REVEALED CERTAIN PROGRAM ATTRIBUTES WHICH ARE IDENTIFIED WITH THE FLUCTUATIONS IN CHILDREN'S ATTENTION TO A TELEVISION PROGRAM. THE PRESENCE OF ANIMALS, VIGOROUS ACTIVITY, MUSIC, PAN CAMERA SHOTS AND CAMERA CUTS WERE ALL RELATED TO INCREASED ATTENTION IN BOTH BOYS AND GIRLS IN A GROUP SIX TO EIGHT YEARS OF AGE. IF SPECIFIC PROGRAM ATTRIBUTES CAN BE MORE CLEARLY SHOWN TO INFLUENCE ATTENTION, THERE ARE OBVIOUS AND IMPORTANT IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMMING.

ASSESSING TELEVISION'S INFLUENCE ON CHILDREN'S PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOR

On February 1, 1973, with funding made available by General Foods Corporation and General Mills, Inc., a research project was initiated to explore the influence on children's behavior of regularly broadcast television programs containing prosocial content. In broad perspective, the effort has its basis in the general concern about the impact of the mass media on our society. More particularly though, it is an extension of the research conducted under the auspices of the Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behavior that produced evidence of a causal link between viewing televised violence and later aggressive behavior by children. The existence of such a link reasonably leads to the expectation of a relationship between television exposure and positive social behavior, providing that television contains prosocial examples for its audience.

Considering the importance of this fact for the socialization of the young, it is striking that so little is known about the potentially positive influence of the medium. Even the most basic questions have gone unanswered: we have virtually no information about the amounts and kinds of positive examples appearing on the screen, about the influence they have, and about the circumstances that optimize attention to and comprehension of such content. The research described in this report was designed as an initial study of these issues.

Analyzing Positive Social Content in Television Programming

Almost since the beginning of television as a mass medium there has been considerable concern among educators, social scientists, and parents about televised violence and aggression. One outgrowth of this interest was the systematic

evaluation of programs with regard to amount of aggression; George Gerbner's work in annually assessing violence over the last several years' programming is notable in this area. It is obvious, though, that television contains a great variety of social examples, including some that are generally considered positive in our culture. To date, there has been no systematic attempt to define these behaviors or to ascertain their frequency. We do not know, even in a very general way, the examples to which children are being exposed. One prong of our research effort thus was the development of a code with which we could evaluate television more comprehensively than before, by analyzing the occurrence of positive social examples.

We began by viewing a large number of entertainment programs, noting the behaviors that might be considered positive in our culture. In this search, we drew on information from previous psychological investigations of prosocial behavior. These behaviors then were classified, the resulting categories were gradually refined, and a methodology to code program content was devised. Although not all televised positive action was included (e.g., special shows presenting concern about ecology), the code is relatively broad in scope. The seven categories specified are:

1. Altruism.
2. Delay of gratification/task persistence.
3. Reparation for bad behavior.
4. Sympathy.
5. Control of aggressive impulses.
6. Resistance to temptation.
7. Explaining feelings of self or others.

The complexity of evaluating prosocial behavior requires an extensive training procedure in the use of the code. Naive raters are introduced to the code by reading a short manual (see Appendix A) that describes the task and provides

a general orientation and rules, as well as the definition and detailed examples of each category of behavior. After studying the manual, the rater views and codes a special half-hour videotape consisting of 12 two-minute segments drawn from a variety of commercial programs. These segments have been selected so that examples of every category appear, including examples of difficult discriminations. Subsequently, the rater codes six half-hour programs that appeared on television, discussing each one with a trained coder before going on to the next one.

The actual coding is accomplished by two raters working independently; they view a videotape of each program that has been segmented into two-minute intervals by an audio dub. During each two-minute interval, the rater notes every time a particular behavior occurred (and describes it briefly along with the name of the character who performed it). The final evaluation of the program consists of the average scores for both raters for all seven categories across all program intervals. Addition of these averages also produces an overall prosocial score.

Inter-rater reliability has been calculated for content analysis of 94 programs appearing on television during the summer, 1974. For the overall prosocial score, the Pearson *r* statistic is .79; the range for the various categories is from .43 to .72.

We anticipate that the code will be a highly useful tool. It is already being used by us in two independent research projects, evaluating the content of over 400 nationally televised programs. Completion of this work will result in the first extensive systematic examination of a broad range of positive examples brought into millions of homes by television. It also will provide a library of programs coded for specific content that can be used in testing particular hypotheses about television's influence.

Effects of Viewing Televised Prosocial Incidents

During the summer of 1973, we initiated actual testing to demonstrate the influence on children of prosocial incidents as they appear on regularly broadcast entertainment television. The first study was designed specifically to investigate the feasibility of the procedures, the adequacy of dependent measures, the possible range of effects to the stimulus materials, and to collect data pertinent to attention.

Study 1.

Study 1 involved volunteer children who were shown episodes of *Lassie* films that had been aired some years ago, and obtained through the cooperation of the Wrather Corporation, which owns the series. Both films were identical in terms of main characters and general setting. One film, though, included many examples of prosocial behavior, particularly helping. The other was considerably more neutral in this regard, depicting few prosocial or antisocial acts. Selection of programs was made initially on the basis of global impression. The prosocial code, in the form in which it then existed, was later applied to the films and confirmed our impressions. The same two commercials were edited into both programs at approximate midpoint, mainly to assure credibility of the viewing situation. Assignment of the children to the prosocial and neutral films was random except that it was assured that each group had an approximately equal number of boys and girls of approximately equal age.

The first step in the procedure was a private parental interview, during which written consent was obtained. The child was then escorted by the experimenter to the TV viewing room. He was told that the experimenter would like to talk to him about the kinds of things children like to

do, but that she first had to take care of a few things. The child was asked to wait for her and told that he could watch television while doing so. The experimenter seated the child, tuned in the television set, and said she would return at the program's termination. Unknown to the youngster, he or she was monitored with a video camera from an adjoining room. One-half hour later, the experimenter returned and conducted the child into another room where he performed a variety of tasks. From the child's viewpoint, the purpose of the tasks was to provide information about his likes and ideas; actually, they were designed as a probe to test possible effects of program content viewed by the child. Each child was also asked questions about the program that he had seen, to assess his understanding of it. He was then returned to his parents, his participation complete.

Of the three dependent measures employed, two showed no differential effects of the prosocial and neutral films. One of the measures consisted of presentation of a series of pairs of slides representing alternative responses to particular social situations. The alternatives, one of which the child was asked to choose, consisted of prosocial, neutral, or mildly antisocial action. Responses of our subjects were overwhelmingly prosocial regardless of film exposure, even though we attempted to reduce the likelihood of demands for the "good"choice. The second measure consisted of the opportunity by the child to help an animal by giving away earned tokens. This task was used because such sharing has been demonstrated previously (with humans as the recipients) and because prosocial action toward an animal is central in the prosocial film. Nevertheless, few subjects gave away their tokens, which they could also trade in for a prize, perhaps in part because such sharing was too costly relative to the interpreted needs of the animal. It is of more than passing interest that responses to the slide and sharing

tasks tended to be in opposite direction. The slides which required only verbal commitment to prosocial behavior elicited high prosocial responsiveness. The sharing tasks which required actual forgoing of reward in order to help, elicited little prosocial action.

The third dependent measure compelled the subject to either help or hinder another child by pushing one of two buttons. The subject was told that another child was playing a game in the adjoining room and that the panel of buttons was connected to the game. The subject could help the child play the game by pushing one button when a light came on and could hinder him by pushing the other button. The longer the button was held while the light was on, the more help or hindrance was given. Actually, there was no other child, but the experimenter went into the adjoining room and presented 15 light-on trials to the subject. The duration of pushing, over these trials, was the dependent measure. For boys, no differential effect was demonstrated. On the other hand, girls who had seen the prosocial program helped more and hindered less than those who had viewed the neutral program ($.05 < p > .01$, one-tailed for both measures). Clearly a task that called for action on the part of the children with regard to helping appeared the most sensitive dependent measure.

Study 2

In Study 2, maximizing knowledge gained from the previous study, we wished to determine whether the presence of a specific act of helping that appeared in the highly successful commercial series, *Lassie*, would induce similar behavior in young viewers when they later found themselves in a comparable situation.

Children in the two principal groups viewed one of the two *Lassie* programs complete with commercial messages. The programs (the same as those used in Study 1) both featured the same canine and human main characters, took place in the

same setting, apparently were written for the same audience, and presumably were motivated by the same entertainment and commercial interests. Whereas the programs necessarily differed somewhat in story line, the critical difference was that one of them had woven into it the particular prosocial example while the other did not. As a further comparison, a third group was also included, in which a generally pleasant situation comedy program, the *Brady Bunch*, was viewed.

Design and participants. A 3 x 2 factorial design was used, employing the television experience (observation of prosocial *Lassie*, neutral *Lassie*, or *Brady Bunch* program) and the sex differentiation of the subjects. The participants were 30 children, 15 boys and 15 girls from four first-grade classes in a middle class, predominantly white suburban neighborhood. The study was conducted in the school and all prospective subjects were given forms to be signed by their parents authorizing their participation. Subjects were selected randomly from the pool of youngsters whose parents returned the consent forms; approximately 80% did so. Within each class and sex, the children were assigned randomly to the film conditions.

One experimenter escorted the child from the classroom to the television viewing room, conducted the screening of the videotape, and then brought the child to the second experimenter in an adjacent room. The second experimenter, who was blind to the treatment condition, administered the dependent measure. The former role was assumed by four graduate students over the course of the study; the latter role was always filled by the same 24-year-old white, female graduate student.

Apparatus and materials. The television viewing room contained a black and white television monitor with a 9-inch screen, programmed by a hidden Sony video recorder. The experimental room, in which assessment was conducted, contained two pieces of apparatus: a Point Game and a Help

button, separated by a distance of five feet and each placed on a child-size desk.

The Point Game consisted of a response key and a display box. The response key was a 7½ by ¼ inch rectangular blue button mounted on a 4 by 6½ inch inclined platform which served as a handrest. The display box was a 6 by 8 inch gray metal box on which a blue 15-watt light bulb and a Cramer digital timer were mounted. The 10's and 1's columns of the timer were covered with black tape. When the button was pressed, the bulb lit and the timer was activated.

The Help button was a small, green, circular button mounted on a 7 by 5 inch gray metal box with the word "Help" printed in black letters directly below it. The Help button activated a second Cramer digital timer which was located outside the experimental room.

Earphones were located next to the game on the desk. They were connected via an extension cable to a tape recorder located outside the experimental room. The tape contained 30 seconds of silence followed by 120 seconds of dogs' barking.

Introduction to the treatment condition. The first experimenter escorted the child from the classroom to the television viewing room, which was a small classroom containing desks, chairs, and the videotape monitor. She told the child that he was going to play a game shortly, but that Miss [the second experimenter] was not ready for him yet. She then turned on the video recorder surreptitiously, turned on the monitor openly, and suggested that the child watch while she did some work in the back of the classroom. All children appeared quite interested in the half-hour programs and the experimenter worked busily to discourage the child from initiating conversation.

Experimental and control conditions. Children in the experimental condition viewed the prosocial *Lassie* program. The episode dealt largely with Lassie's efforts to hide her

runt puppy so that it would not be given away. The story's climax occurred when the puppy slipped into a mining shaft and fell onto the ledge below. Unable to help, Lassie brought her master, Jeff, and Jeff's grandfather to the scene. Jeff then risked his life by hanging over the edge of the shaft to save the puppy. The selection of the program was based on the inclusion of this dramatic helping scene.

In one control condition, the neutral *Lassie* program was shown. Featuring the same major characters as the prosocial program, it dramatized Jeff's attempts to avoid taking violin lessons. It was devoid of any example of a human helping a dog, but necessarily featured the animal in a positive light.

In the second control condition, the youngsters viewed the *Brady Bunch*, a nonaggressive, non-animated children's program which did not feature a dog. The program depicted the youngest Brady children's efforts to be important by trying to set a record for time spent on a seesaw. It provided a measure of children's willingness to help after exposure to a popular program that showed positive interpersonal family encounters but no cues pertinent to either human or canine heroism.

Assessment of willingness to help puppies in distress. Assessment consisting of placing the child in a situation that required him to choose between continuing to play for self-gain and trying to get help for puppies in distress.

1. Introduction of the game. After the television program was viewed, the first experimenter told the child that Miss [the second experimenter] was ready for him, escorted the child to the experimental room, performed appropriate introductions, and departed. The child was invited to play the Point Game in which he could earn points by pressing a button that lit a bulb. The number of points obtained was displayed on a timer visible to him. The experimenter showed the child a display of prizes,

situated on two desks, that varied in size and attractiveness--from small, unappealing erasers to large, colorful board games. It was noted that "some prizes are bigger and better than others," and that "the more points you get in the game, the better your prize will be." The experimenter then told the child that she was going to let him play the game alone so that she could finish some work down the hall.

2. Introduction of distress situation. The experimenter started to leave, then returned and exclaimed:

> Oh, there's something else I'd like you to do while I'm gone. You see, I'm in charge of a dog kennel a few miles from here--that's a place that we keep puppies until a home can be found for them. I had to leave the puppies alone so that I could come here today, but I know whether the dogs are safe or not by listening through these earphones [indicating] which are connected to the kennel by wires. When I don't hear any noises through the earphones, I know the dogs are O.K.--they're either playing quietly or sleeping. But if I hear them barking, I know something is wrong. I know that they are in trouble and need help. If I hear barking, I press this button [indicating Help button] which signals my helper who lives near the kennel, and when he hears the signal, he goes over to the kennel to make sure nothing bad happened to the dogs.
>
> While I'm gone, I'd like you to wear the earphones for me while you play your game. If you don't hear any barking, everything is O.K. at the kennel; but if you hear barking, you can help the puppies if you want by pressing the Help button. You might have to press the button for a long time before my helper hears the signal,

and there's a better chance he'll hear it if you press it a lot. You can tell when he has heard the signal when you hear the dogs stop barking.

Remember, this game is over as soon as I come back--you won't be able to get any points after that. Try to get as many points as you can because the more points you get, the better your prize will be. You know, if the puppies start barking, you'll have to choose between helping the puppies by pressing the Help button and getting more points for yourself by pressing the blue button. It's up to you.

After being assured that the child understood the situation, the experimenter placed the earphones on the child and left the room. When outside the experimental room, she immediately turned on the tape recorder and a stop watch. The child first heard 30 seconds of silence followed by 120 seconds of increasingly frantic barking. The experimenter recorded the latency of helping, re-entered the experimental room 60 seconds after the cessation of barking, and awarded a prize which was loosely based on the number of points earned. After the child was escorted to his classroom, the total seconds of helping was recorded from the timer located outside the experimental room.

Results and discussion. The primary dependent measure was the number of seconds the Help button was pressed. The mean helping scores for all cells of the design are shown in Table 1. A 3 (treatment) x 2 (sex) analysis of variance of these scores yielded only one significant effect, for treatment conditions ($F=4.97$, $p < .05$); neither the main effect for Sex nor the Sex x Treatment interaction were significant ($F=2.18$ and 2.80, respectively). Dunnett's t tests revealed that subjects who saw the prosocial *Lassie* program helped

significantly more than those in the neutral *Lassie* (t=2.08, p<.05) or the *Brady Bunch* condition (t=2.79, p<.01). The latter groups did not differ from one another (t=.66).

A parallel 3 x 2 analysis of variance of latency to help scores revealed no significant differences, but the tendency was consistent with amount of helping: 24.6 seconds for the prosocial *Lassie*, 36.1 seconds for the neutral *Lassie*, and 55.4 seconds for the family situation comedy.

The results of this experiment disclose clearly that a televised example can, at least under some circumstances, increase a child's willingness to engage in helping behavior. The design of the study permitted us to isolate the particular aspect of the program, a prosocial example by the protagonist, as the central ingredient necessary for such an effect to occur; the alternative *Lassie* show and the generally warm *Brady Bunch* program produced significantly less helping. Inasmuch as the former control program featured the same major characters, setting, and general dramatic style as the prosocial *Lassie* show, it is unlikely that factors other than the specific modeled example influenced helping. This conclusion is further bolstered by the comparison of helping responses between children who saw either the neutral *Lassie* or *Brady Bunch* shows; the mere presence of a canine hero in the former did not itself significantly facilitate helping of puppies in distress.

Theoretically, the results support the social learning view of Bandura (1969; 1971) and Liebert (1972; 1973; Liebert, Neale & Davidson, 1973) that the effects of television on behavior are mediated by specific modeling cues and the interpretation of these cues by the child. The practical implications of the present demonstration are also clear: it is possible to produce television programming that features action and adventure, appeals to child and family audiences, and still has a salutary rather than negative social influence on observers. A detailed understanding of the modeling processes

involved in such influence may contribute to the production of other socially desirable programs in the future.

TABLE 1

Mean helping scores (in seconds) for all groups

	Sex of Subject		
	Female	Male	Combined
Prosocial *Lassie*	105.48	79.80	92.64
Neutral *Lassie*	34.80	68.20	51.50
Brady Bunch	8.50	66.50	37.50

Analysis of Attention to Program Content

The third prong of our research effort was the specification of the program attributes which are identified with the fluctuations in children's attention to a television program. The basic observations were collected in Study 1 (see page 8) in the form of 49 split-screen videotapes that showed simultaneously the actual *Lassie* program being seen and the child's facial reactions to it. These tapes were analyzed in two ways.

The first procedure involved recording the amount of time each subject attended to specific intervals of the program, characterizing each of the program intervals along several dimensions, and then correlating the attention and program content information.

Attention was defined as "eyes on the television screen" and was quantified independently by two raters who timed attention from the video-tapes on cumulative stopwatches. Each rater turned on his stopwatch when the eyes were averted. A time sampling procedure was used which involved observing and "clocking" the child's attention for 50 seconds, and then recording the seconds and resetting the stopwatch in the subsequent 10 seconds. There were 24 such observation periods for each program. The two 30-second commercials also were coded in this manner, making adjustment for the shorter time intervals. Two critical sources of bias were controlled in this procedure. First, only the child's face was visible to the raters, eliminating bias caused by knowledge of the television program content. Second, the two raters scored the attention from monitors located in different rooms which maximized the independence of ratings. The inter-observer reliability of the attention ratings averaged .80 when a two-second or less discrepancy between the two ratings for a 50-second interval was counted as an "agreement," and .95 when a four-second or less discrepancy was counted as an

"agreement." Reliability was computed according to the formula: # agreements/#agreements + #disagreements.

The program content was divided into 24, 50-second intervals which coincided with the intervals viewed for the attentional analysis. Two raters viewed the *Lassie* programs several times, characterizing each interval along different dimensions. Some of the factors analyzed are level of excitement, amount of action, amount of music, number of children present, and number of adults present. For each subject, then, there were 24 scores representing the amount of attention paid to each 50-second interval. For each film, there were 24 scores for each program attribute, representing the amount of the given factor in each 50-second interval.

The final step was to correlate the average attention paid to each of the 24 intervals (averaged across subjects) with the 24 interval ratings for each of the program factors. Separate correlations were computed for the two programs. The magnitude of the correlation coefficients represents the degree of relationship between attention and the program attributes. The greater the relationship, the more potent the attributes in drawing attention.

This initial analysis of the attention/content data revealed several interesting relationships:

1. Overall attention is remarkably different for the two films. This is evident in total attention time, the prosocial program being attended to significantly more by both sexes than the neutral film. Perhaps even more interesting is the differential pattern of attention (see Figure 1). The pattern for the prosocial film may be described as a slight rise which, except for a few dips, maintained itself. For the neutral film, it may be described as a downward trend during the latter part of the program. It is noteworthy that the patterns for each program held for both boys and girls. The lack of sex differences for both time and pattern strongly suggests that the stimulus material determines attention to

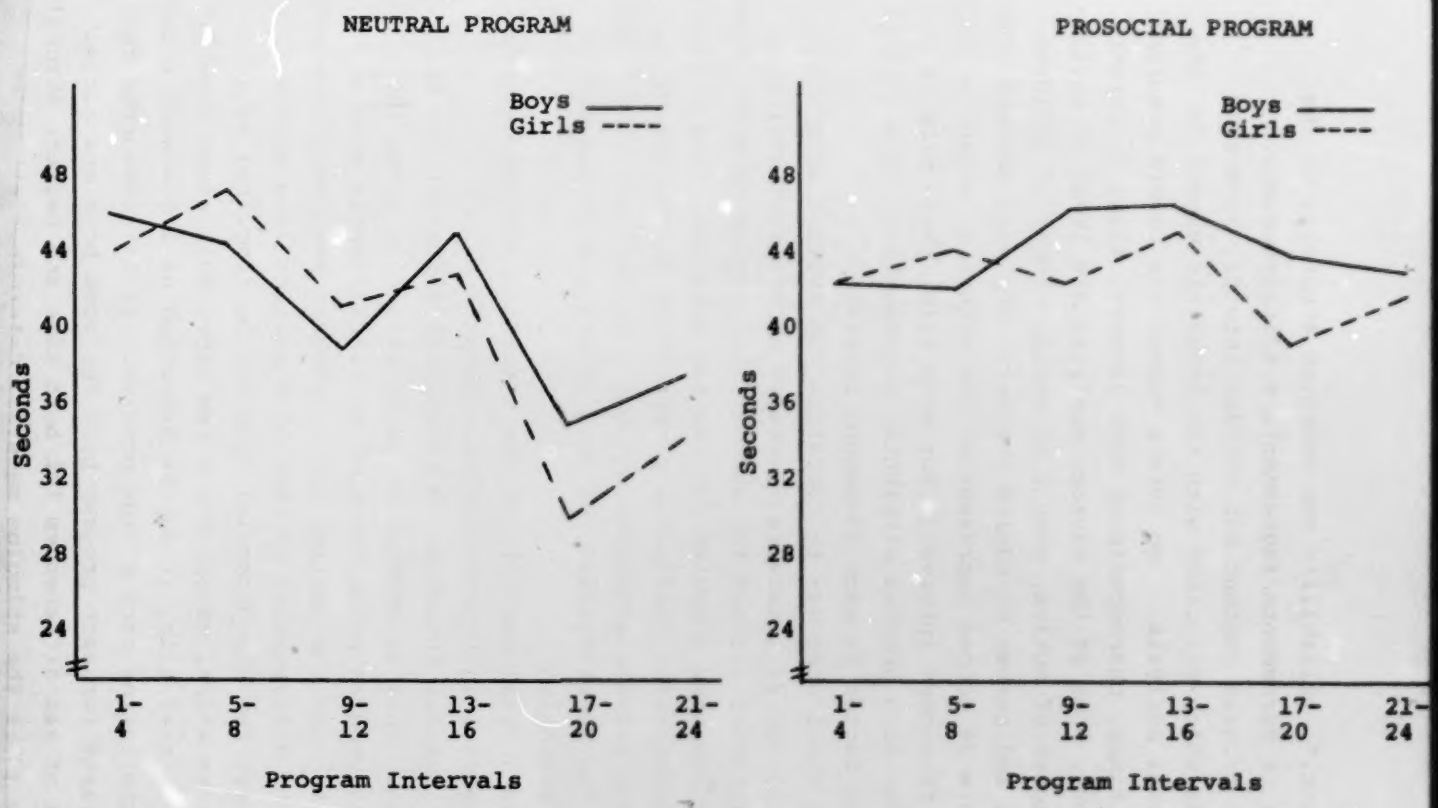

Figure 1. Mean number of seconds of attention of boys and girls across 50 second intervals of the neutral and prosocial *Lassie* programs.

a much greater degree than any variables relating to the child viewer.

2. Age of the child correlated with total attention to the neutral film (r=+.37) but not to the prosocial film (r=-.05). There was a tendency for the older children to pay more attention than the younger ones in the neutral condition. We speculate that this may be due to the high level of talking and the low level of action in the neutral program.

3. Amount of action seems to be an important determiner of attention. The correlation between amount of action and amount of attention is +.34 for the prosocial program and +.45 for the neutral program. Further, action appears to be somewhat more potent for boys than for girls. (The correlations between action and attention for the prosocial program is +.40 for the boys and + .17 for the girls; for the neutral program, the corresponding relationship is +.50 for the boys and +.34 for the girls.)

4. Amount of background music also seems to influence attention. The correlation between the amount of music and the amount of attention is +.27 for the prosocial program and +.34 for the neutral program. Boys and girls were similar in the degree of the relationship. However, since the correlation between the amount of action and the amount of music was high (in the vicinity of +.60 for both programs) it must be concluded that both are important and tend to vary together, but that their relationship to attention may not be additive.

5. Analyses of the attention paid to the interval including the first commercial and the program interval preceding the first commercial indicate that for both programs attention dropped significantly when the commercial appeared (t = 2.94, $p < .01$; t = 5.07, $p < .01$). This finding is consistent with Ward (1972) and Bechtel et al (1972), both of whom found that attention falls off during exposure to commercials.

These findings were sufficiently promising to warrant further on-line computer analysis, which was conducted in collaboration with Dr. Daniel Anderson and his colleagues of the University of Massachusetts. A continuous recording of attention (i.e., eyes on television screen) of each child throughout the program he viewed was fed directly into a computer along with information as to the presence or absence at any one moment of a particular attribute of the programming. A 2 (presence or absence of the attribute) x 2 (sex of the child) analysis of variance was performed for each of several attributes to determine their influence on attention. As can be seen in Tables 2 and 3, eight of the attributes analyzed were significantly related to attention in the same way to both *Lassie* programs. The presence of animals, vigorous activity, music, pan camera shots, and camera cuts was related to increased attention in both boys and girls, except that camera cuts in the neutral program was related primarily to girls' attention. The presence of an adult female, a woman talking, and a man talking was, conversely, related to decreased attention, the latter for only female children in the prosocial *Lassie*. Auditory change also was significantly associated with attention, but in different directions for the two programs. Several other attributes were related to attention in one program but not in the other.

In interpreting these results, we are particularly interested in the generality of the effects; that is, whether or not there is an effect in the same direction across both programs. It would not be surprising to find that program content and format interact with specific attributes. In these *Lassie* programs, for example, the mother is the major female character and she is portrayed as a loving but nagging female. To those of us familiar with these shows, the finding that presence of a female or a female talking decreased attention coincided with our own subjective reactions. But this is not to conclude the presence of a female always has an inhibitory influence on attention.

Table 2

Analysis of attributes according to their presence and absence in the prosocial *Lassie* programs.

Attribute	Percent of program time when attribute occurred	Percent of attention time when attribute present	Percent of attention time when attribute absent	F value for effect of attribute	F value for interaction with sex
Adult female	21.9	84.2	89.0	11.35**	ns
Animals	59.0	89.8	85.3	23.00***	ns
Vigorous activity	4.6	91.1	87.8	4.91*	ns
Man talking	10.1	85.5	88.3	7.09*	6.45*
Woman talking	8.3	79.1	88.6	21.33***	ns
Music	60.3	90.2	84.3	21.18***	ns
Cuts	16.5	89.1	87.0	7.67*	ns
Pan	7.0	90.7	87.7	5.81*	ns
Auditory change	4.4	86.0	88.3	9.00**	4.5*
Adult male	33.8	87.8	88.1	ns	ns
Male child	49.0	88.4	87.5	ns	ns
Female child	6.5	88.3	87.9	ns	ns
Eye contact	3.0	83.9	88.1	5.41*	ns
Child talking	17.0	88.3	87.9	ns	ns
Peculiar voice	1.5	77.3	88.6	ns	4.99*
Letters/script	1.9	81.8	88.1	ns	ns
Animation	1.6	79.6	88.1	ns	ns
Still shot	87.8	87.7	90.1	ns	ns
Zoom	1.1	87.9	87.9	ns	ns
Sound effects	18.4	88.1	87.9	ns	ns
Commercials	4.0	80.1	88.3	ns	ns

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

Table 3

Analysis of attributes according to their presence and absence in the neutral *Lassie* programs.

Attribute	Percent of program time when attribute occurred	Percent of attention time when attribute present	Percent of attention time when attribute absent	F value for effect of attribute	F value for interaction with sex
Adult female	38.3	77.5	84.8	20.4***	ns
Animals	37.3	87.0	79.3	25.9***	ns
Vigorous activity	1.4	98.3	82.0	82.0***	ns
Man talking	24.0	69.1	86.3	51.3***	ns
Woman	12.1	77.4	82.8	9.5**	ns
Music	28.2	88.7	80.0	28.3***	ns
Cuts	12.7	84.0	81.2	7.6*	5.4*
Pan	4.3	94.1	81.7	72.7***	ns
Auditory change	3.5	88.3	81.4	24.1***	ns
Adult male	49.4	75.9	87.9	41.6***	ns
Male child	61.5	85.0	77.8	31.8***	ns
Female child	0.7	66.4	82.3	ns	ns
Eye contact	2.9	83.1	82.2	ns	ns
Child talking	23.2	87.1	80.8	17.9***	ns
Peculiar voice	1.6	82.3	82.2	ns	ns
Letters/script	1.9	74.6	82.3	ns	ns
Animation	1.6	81.7	82.2	ns	ns
Still shot	92.9	81.6	91.1	42.5***	ns
Zoom	1.0	81.8	82.2	ns	ns
Sound effects	11.6	91.0	81.0	47.11***	ns
Commercials	4.0	73.8	82.5	ns	ns
Singing	1.7	81.6	91.1	42.5***	ns
Laughing	1.0	78.8	82.2	ns	ns

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

The next step required by this research, then, clearly is an analysis of a wide spectrum of programs. We also would like to know whether the determinants of attention are different for different aged children. The practical implications of this line of investigation is enormous in that it can provide guidelines to all those designing any kind of visual-audio media, whether to teach explicit educational tasks, to simply entertain, or to explicitly convey prosocial lessons.

Concluding Comments

This research has taken us significantly forward in our interest and involvement in exploring television's positive influence on children. As mentioned earlier, the prosocial code that was developed is already being used in extensive surveys of current programming. Several studies designed to examine the direct impact of specific televised examples on attention, attitudes, and behavior also are underway. Thus, the multi-pronged project embarked upon in 1973, with special funding from our two sponsors, has fulfilled our expectation that it provide a foundation for future research. The rationale for this research remains the same: We believe that television is a powerful teacher in society, that it frequently has taught antisocial lessons, and that its potential to shape positive behavior has been sadly neglected. Our hope, of course, is that we may contribute toward the realization of this neglected potential.

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APPENDIX A

A manual for evaluating prosocial content of television programming*

* Developed by Emily S. Davidson and John M. Neale with the collaboration of Rita Wicks Poulos and Robert M. Liebert. This is a working draft of a laboratory instrument. As such, it is subject to continuing modification and refinement.

INTRODUCTION

Purpose and description

This manual consists of instructions in observing and counting some types of socially relevant actions that appear on television. The pages which follow contain category names and definitions of several types of behavior, with detailed instructions about how to apply each category. In addition, a set of general instructions precedes the detailed category descriptions, and applies to all categories.

Rater training

The first step in training is careful study of this manual. The code is a detailed one, and accurate, reliable rating requires thorough knowledge of it. After you have studied the manual, you will take a multiple choice test on its contents, then an experimenter will discuss the test with you. There will also be time for you to bring up any question or problems you have about rating.

In the next step, you will see a series of two-minute segments taken from actual TV programs, which you will code. These segments contain examples of the many types of behavior (and many types of programs) which you will be observing. The results of this coding will be discussed with you.

In the final step of training, you will code six half-hour programs as they originally appeared on television, and discuss your results with an experimenter. At this point you are a certified rater.

Method of viewing

In using this code, you will observe a program by yourself, and another person will also view it alone. You will be in a room containing a videotape recorder, a television set, a chair, and a desk. Codesheets will be available in the lab. You will be instructed in the use of the videotape equipment in the course of training.

1. The codesheet. The codesheet will contain spaces for your name, the name of the program, the date it was recorded, and the date of coding. This information is to be filled in before you begin. Below this information you will see columns, labeled with the names of the behavior categories. Each column is divided into segments, each representing two minutes of program content. During each segment, you are to put a number under the appropriate category for each relevant behavior you observe. (More than one instance of a given type of behavior can occur in any one segment.) You should also write a brief description of the behavior, and note the character who performed it. An example of a completed codesheet, showing five program segments, is provided on the following page.

2. Timing. The beginning of the relevant portion of each program is signalled by the word START. Each program is divided into two-minute segments; the beginning of each segment is signalled by its number: 2,3, and so on. Commercials are not coded.

Reliability

For this code to be useful, it must be reliable. To accomplish this, observers viewing the same program must code the same behaviors in the same way. Therefore, the coding produced by you will be compared to another person's results, and a statistical estimate of reliability computed. In order for this estimate to be high, you must pay very close attention to the program you are coding.

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

Behavior

The word "behavior" is used in a general sense to mean both nonverbal action and verbalization. Thus, examples of sympathetic behavior are:

1. Reaching out to touch someone's hand.
2. Verbally expressing sympathy.

Series Name *The Waltons* Tape # 6 Coder Barbara Nelson

Date Recorded 5/30/74 Date of Coding 6/4/74

Segment #	Altruism	Delay of Gratification/ Task Persistence	Reparation for Bad Behavior	Sympathy	Control of Aggressive Impulses	Explaining Feelings of Self or Others	Resistance to Temptation
1	1. Grandpa tells them where tree is					1. Seth explains about how hard it will be for his mama	
2			1. Seth apologizes for yelling to his mother			1. John explains why Jason won't speak to him	
3				1. Wilma: sit down and relax; you still have touch of a chill			
4	1. John Boy agrees to get wood for Seth	1. Seth puts final touches on recorder					
5	1. Mother offers to have John Boy drive them home			1. Mrs. Walton comforts Wilma 2. Seth comforts Wilma			

Single and multiple coding

1. If several people are involved in the same prosocial act at the same time, it should be coded only once. For example, if someone is injured, and several people express concern, it is coded as one instance of sympathy.
2. If verbal and nonverbal acts occur simultaneously, they should be coded only once. For example, if a character says "Let's keep working on this task," and does, it is one instance of task persistence. If verbal and nonverbal behavior related to the same aspect occur with a time interval between them, code them as two instances.

Intent

The intentions of the doer, and not necessarily the needs or reactions of the recipient, underlie our assessment of prosocial behavior.

1. Prosocial behavior which was not necessary should be coded. (e.g., helping a woman across the street when she actually does not require help.)
2. Prosocial behavior which is unsuccessful should be coded.
3. Behavior performed in a servile or ingratiating manner, or which is clearly intended as a bribe to get something should not be coded. (e.g., "Oh, yes. I'd be delighted to do whatever you say.")
4. Behavior performed in a hostile or sarcastic way should not be coded. (e.g., one person gives instructions to another, but intent is to show off.)

Code the statement of intention to do a prosocial act, and then the actual doing at a later time as two separate incidents. Exception: Statement of intention and action within the same scene (same time and location) are coded only once.

Animals

Prosocial acts can be performed by animals. This is clearly the case in cartoons using humanoid-animal characters. In some

shows using live animals, such as *Lassie*, the animal's behavior is viewed as intelligent, and also should be coded.

Double-coding

There is some over-lap between categories. For example, control of aggression can also be considered as resistance to the temptation to aggress. Always code the behavior in the more specific category, in this case, control of aggression. Other examples will be pointed out in the sections on specific categories. Do not code the same behavior in two categories.

Songs

When coding a song, code each main theme once. Do not code each instance of a single theme, (e.g., when a chorus is repeated). If the song is repeated after conversation or another scene, code again. If a scene is repeated within a story (e.g., literally re-showing it at the end of the program), code again in the usual manner. Code visual instances accompanying a song separately from the verbal component.

Other positive acts

This code is not intended to include every positive act on television drama. Thus, do not try to force an act to fit some category just because you think it should be coded somewhere.

Altruism

Definition

Altruism consists of sharing, helping, and cooperation involving humans or animals.

1. Sharing. Spontaneous (not under instructions) gift or loan to another of one's own possessions or anything one has legitimate control over.
2. Helping. Giving help to another so that he can achieve his goal. May include:
   - physical assistance
   - instructions
   - helping with a task
   - giving advice

3. Cooperation. Working together of two or more individuals to achieve either a mutual goal or independent goals.

Examples

Sharing

1. One child asks another if he can have some of his popcorn. The other child says, "Sure, help yourself."
2. One man says, "My car is in the shop and I'm really having trouble getting to work." His friend replies, "You can borrow my car for a couple of days."
3. One child tells another he can play with his toys.

Helping

1. Two people are walking by a river and one falls in. The other helps him out of the water.
2. One child is trying to learn to ride a bike. His friend steadies the bike, shouts directions, etc.
3. One child is doing his math homework. His older brother shows him how to work a problem.
4. A man is changing a tire on his car. Someone stops and offers to help.
5. A girl is not getting along with her best friend, partly because her friend thinks she is snubbing her. The girl talks to another friend who suggests that she explain to her friend that she has been busy taking care of her little brother.

Cooperation

1. Three girls are camping out and put up the tent together.
2. Two boys decide to do a school project together. One boy does the art work, the other makes up the letters and captions.

In many cases the three subcategories of altruism overlap. It is for this reason that they have been collapsed into one large category. For the purpose of the code, the observer does not need to discriminate between the subcategories. One example

of overlap is in Example #2 of sharing, which also can be considered helping. The following example could be considered as either cooperation or helping:

Two men work together to dig a well for a man who has been injured and cannot do it himself.

Special cases

1. Role behaviors. Do not code actions that fit the above descriptions but are role behaviors accomplished in the normal conduct of occupational or social roles. (e.g., a policeman giving directions, a doctor treating someone, a mother-housewife cooking a meal, a frogman cooperating with others to retrieve a space capsule.) However, if the action appears to go beyond typical role demands, code as prosocial. Frequently, the action may seem important in terms of theme and plot. (e.g., performing free service for which one is typically paid, making special effort to cook a food someone particularly likes.) A good rule of thumb is work which is done without pay (an explicit statement that work is free), done on off-hours, or outside of usual work location.

Examples

a. Doctors. Stopping at scene of an accident. This is outside of usual work location (hospital or office), is on off-hours, and is not required of staff doctor.

b. Teachers. Advice on personal problems, extra tutoring at night. Sponsoring a club or other school activity is a role behavior.

In many programs, a character carries out role behaviors to help someone with whom he has developed a close personal relationship. In most cases, code only the sympathy, not the helping.

Examples

a. Policemen. Friend of policeman is kidnapped. Policemen look for kidnapper, obtain descriptions of

suspects, etc. Presumably, they would do this regardless of the victim.

b. Doctors. Patient is child of friend. But doctor would operate, examine, give drugs, or whatever, to any patient.

Action of characters such as Superman and Wonder Woman who possess superhuman power and are generally viewed as crime fighters, should not be coded when they directly involve the crime fighting. Actions not directly related to crime fighting can be coded.

Example

Superman rushing sick child to hospital with superhuman speed.

2. Social convention behaviors. Do not code action that is primarily social convention. (e.g., offering someone a cup of coffee, saying, "Pardon me," holding a door for someone as a polite gesture.) However, if the action goes beyond normal demands of social convention--in effort, intent, time, or plot--code as prosocial. (e.g., inviting someone to coffee in order to alleviate his loneliness, holding a door for someone whose arms are full or who otherwise obviously needs help.)

3. Antisocial acts. Do not code action aimed toward antisocial goals. (e.g., cooperating to steal or play a prank, helping someone to escape justified police apprehension.)

4. Double coding. Most prosocial behaviors can be considered as helping behaviors, in a broad sense of the term. (For example, stopping a fight helps both participants in the fight.) Do not code these behaviors as helping; use the more specific code category instead (in the above example, Control of Aggression). Advice to perform prosocial behavior is coded in the category suggested by the advisor. (e.g., advice to persist in a task is coded as task persistence, not helping.)

5. Helping through aggression. Do not code helping through aggression as prosocial. (e.g., helping a friend by joining him in a brawl against others should not be coded.)

Delay of Gratification/Task Persistence

Definition

Delay of gratification/task persistence consists of the related acts of delay of gratification and task persistence, expressed either nonverbally or verbally.

1. Delay of gratification. Postponing or forgoing completely a less-valued product, reward, or situation in order to achieve a potential more-valued product, reward, or situation. It is not necessary that the potential goal be specified. Relevant behaviors often involve verbalization of intent. (e.g., "I'm not going to play now because I have to study for a test.")
2. Task persistence. Action or statements pertaining to spending additional time or effort on a task so that a goal may be reached or a product made better. May include:
   a. Positive statements about working slowly or more carefully.
   b. Continuing to work on a task when it so far has not been successful. In this case, the behaviors aimed toward the goal may vary. That is, if the individual takes one approach to the goal, it fails, and he turns to another approach--code one instance of delay of gratification/task persistence. If a character persists in a prosocial act (continues to help, continues to explain feelings, etc.), code in the other category, not as task persistence.

Examples

1. Two people are looking for something they've lost. One says he's tired, but the other says they should continue looking.

2. A man is trying to get some information from the library. When the library closes he has not found it yet. The next day, he is back in the library, still looking.

3. Two men are exploring a cave. One man says they must go slowly, and be careful.

Reparation For Bad Behavior

Definition

Reparation for bad behavior refers to behavior which is clearly intended as reparation for an act seen as a wrong-doing committed by the person himself. It may include:

1. Attempts to repair physical damage of some kind.
2. Admission of mistake and/or apology, particularly following "psychological" damage such as insults or bad temper.
3. Attempts to insure that the wrong-doing will be eliminated or reduced. (e.g., promising to seek counseling.)

Examples

1. A man falsely accuses another man of a crime. After the second man is found innocent, the first man apologizes.
2. A girl is supposed to be watching the supper. She daydreams and the supper burns. Her mother comes in and is very angry; the girl apologizes and asks if she can fix something else.
3. Two children are playing and one carelessly breaks the other's toy. He says he is sorry and offers a toy of his own in replacement.
4. One child hits another, and the second child starts to cry. The first says he is sorry, and offers to share his candy.

Special cases

1. Do not code apparent reparations which are, in fact, insincere, flip, manipulative, or in other ways not clearly intended as reparations.

2. Do not code action for which the doer may apologize but which he actually feels is "right." (e.g., saying, "I'm sorry I have to do this," as he turns someone in to the police. In some cases, this may be coded as sympathy.)
3. Do not code actions, usually verbal, which are repeated on the film, or which, according to the film, have been repeated in the past (so that they are almost ritualistic) without being followed by stronger behavior where the latter is clearly called for. (e.g., an alcoholic apologizes for his drunkenness when it's clear that he has been apologizing for years. In the next scene, he is drinking and it's apparent that he has not tried to do anything more to prevent it.)

Sympathy

Definition

Sympathy is a verbal or behavioral expression of concern for others and their problems.

1. Verbal expressions. May be directed toward the recipient himself or it may be in conversation with another about the recipient. Code conversation as one instance even though several individuals may be involved.
2. Behavioral expressions. Refers to actions such as putting an arm around someone. If a behavioral and verbal expression occur simultaneously, code as one instance of sympathy.

Examples

1. One student is having trouble in class. Two of his teachers discuss the problems he is having and wonder if he is having trouble at home.
2. One person meets a friend who looks upset. The first person says, "Has something happened? You look worried."
3. Someone falls down the stairs. Several people stop and ask if he is all right.

Special cases

1. Do not code comments that superficially express sympathy or concern but are primarily social convention. (e.g., "Hi, how are you?") If, however, such a question receives a serious answer that is then given concern, code as an instance of sympathy.
2. Sympathy often accompanies other prosocial behaviors. For example, while giving advice (helping) an individual may also put his arm about the recipient. Code as sympathy only if a major part of the sequence is an expression of concern. Sympathy for oneself is not coded.

Control of Aggressive Impulses

Definition

Control of aggressive impulses involves nonaggressive acts or statements which serve to eliminate or prevent aggression by self or others towards humans or animals.

Examples

1. A boy comes home from school angry because another boy called him names, and wants to beat the other boy up. His father explains that it would be better to ignore him.
2. Two children are fighting over a toy. Another child suggests that they take turns with the toy.
3. A policeman is about to arrest a man who could be violent. He draws his gun, but then puts it back and talks the man into giving himself up.
4. A group of underwater explorers is trying to capture a shark, which has swallowed an important piece of equipment. Rather than killing the shark, they operate to remove the object. (Code one.) After it is done, a

man who had opposed the plan says, "I learned that you don't have to use a harpoon to get what you want." (Code again.)

5. Two boys are having an argument. They start to fight, but their friends break them apart, and calm them down.

Explaining Feelings of Self or Others

Definition

Explaining feelings of self or others consists of statements to another person(s) explaining the feelings, thinking, or action of self or others with the intent of effective positive outcome, including increasing the understanding of others, resolving strife, smoothing out difficulties, or reassuring someone.

Exception: If a narrator says something to audience with the explicit intention of teaching a lesson, then code it (occasionally the content of the message will cause it to be coded in a different category). This is most likely to happen on children's programs (e.g., *Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids, Misteroger's Neighborhood*).

Examples

1. A very bright 12-year-old boy is placed in senior high school. He tries to take part in every activity, social and athletic, but cannot successfully. He explains to his teacher that he is trying to prove himself with his fellow students.

2. A little boy comes home crying to his father that his best friend was nasty to him. His father explains that his friend has been sick, and that sometimes people are bad-tempered when they do not feel well.

3. Several children go to an amusement park, and ride the roller-coaster, visit the horror house, etc. One boy is afraid, but tries not to show it. His friends tell him that everyone is afraid of something, and that it is nothing to be ashamed of.

Special Cases

1. If the explanation immediately follows an apology, or seems to be an attempt to make up for one's own bad behavior, code it all as one instance of REPARATION, not as one instance of REPARATION and another of EXPLAINING FEELINGS. (e.g., "I'm sorry I yelled at you. I've been worried about your father finding another job.")
2. Do code anti-racist statements which teach that people of different races are similar in many ways, or that racism is bad. These may include visual portions, perhaps with a song, showing children playing together, etc. The intent should be clearly to demonstrate that different races can get along. However, do not code flip one-line statements (e.g., black is beautiful). Do not code every friendly interaction between people of different races. (e.g., when black star talks to white star about football.)

Resistance to Temptation

Definition

Resistance to temptation refers to withstanding the temptation to engage in behaviors generally prohibited by society (e.g., stealing), which may be prohibited in the program explicitly or implicitly.

Examples

1. A group of children is angry at a man for taking their clubhouse. They decide to get back at him by putting garbage on his lawn. One child refuses to go along, saying it is wrong.
2. A little girl has the chance to steal some candy. She takes some but then she puts it back.
3. A girl is running for class president. She makes a lot of campaign promises, and someone tells her she should not make promises that she knows she can't keep.

Special cases

1. Behaviors may include those for which no immediate or clear benefit is evident (e.g., resisting engaging in vandalism or mischievous pranks). The implied benefit may be only having fun.

2. Resistance to temptation should be motivated by the feeling that the act is wrong, rather than it is inconvenient. For example, if a high school student refuses to engage in vandalism because he is ill, it would not be coded. On the other hand, someone may give an excuse rather than go against peer pressure, but actually feels the act is wrong. When this is the case, in the context of the program, the behavior should be coded.

3. Statements or decision that a particular form of behavior is prohibited (e.g., "It's wrong to lie.") should be coded. These statements may follow the commission of a prohibited behavior by someone else.